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ABSTRACT

This report covers the second year (1991-1992) of a 3-year study of substance abuse prevention and interventions programs in the New York City public schools. Included are findings from a survey of 891 students who received substance abuse intervention services in the schools, and from a field study in 12 sample schools focusing on services that the first year's study had identified as warranting close attention, including peer programs, staff development, and parent involvement. Chapter I describes the background of the project, briefly reviewing findings of the 1990-1991 study before turning attention to the current study. Chapter II presents the results of the survey of students participating in intervention counseling. Chapter III discusses the SPARK Peer Players' role in the high school substance abuse prevention program. Chapter IV describes staff development offered by Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) and parent outreach efforts. Chapter V offers evaluators' conclusions and recommendations based on the data analyzed in this report. The document concludes that intervention services and consistent support from professional staff are vital for at-risk youth, and that peer programs are effective prevention strategies, but need to be supported by district administrators, school staff, and parents, and efforts to involve both teachers and parents in substance abuse prevention need to be increased. (Author/NB)

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ED 364 814

OREA Report

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE 1991-1992 SCHOOL YEAR

OCTOBER, 1993

CG025137

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA) has undertaken a three-year study of substance abuse prevention and intervention programs in the public schools. This report covers the second year (1991-92) of the study, which included a survey of 891 students who received substance abuse intervention services in the schools, plus a field study in 12 sample schools focusing on services that the first year's study had identified as warranting close attention, including peer programs, staff development, and parent involvement.

The study survey data revealed that the largest percentage of students receiving services were in the middle schools, and that these services typically included both individual and group counseling by Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS). Between 30 and 50 percent of the students reported improvement in such areas as grades, relationships with teachers, and attendance after receiving these services, and about one-half said that dealing with various problems in their lives, such as their relationship with their family, had become easier. About 80 percent said that they were feeling happier since receiving SAPIS counseling, and roughly the same percentage said that they had used their increased knowledge about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol in making decisions in their personal lives. In addition, analyses of the survey responses revealed that the longer students received counseling, the more positively they rated themselves in terms of school performance, life skills, and self-esteem; other factors such as age, sex, household arrangements, or type of counseling received had no significant impact on these ratings. The largest number of students among this group were eleventh and twelfth graders.

Although the 1990-91 study had revealed that a large percentage of the elementary and middle schools in the city have peer programs, and that these programs can be an effective force for change, the four schools visited by OREA that had such programs reported problems in running the programs, such as limited time, and the tendency of these programs to be seen as being for "goody-goody" kids. These programs seemed to function better in the high schools. One of the most successful peer training efforts is the SPARK Peer Players, which is a group of NYC public high school graduates who create and present theatrical programs about substance abuse for high school audiences. The presentations observed by OREA evaluators seemed very effective, and feedback forms completed by students after the performance supported this view. Administrators reported that the impact of these presentations continues long after the performance is over. SPARK players also said that they found their work rewarding, but reported some difficulties in handling

the emotional stress generated by the presentations, transportation and space constraints, limitations on personal time for this work, and bureaucratic restraints and regulations. SPARK peer player staff suggested that efforts be made to better coordinate the program with the visited schools, and that the Players be given financial compensation for travel costs and greater flexibility in timekeeping.

This year's study confirmed the previous year's finding that the staff development provided to teachers by SAPIS regarding the identification and referral of substance abusers is uneven, and consists primarily of informal contacts. Furthermore, only a small percentage of the teachers reporting interactions with SAPIS indicated that they were utilizing the information they had gathered with their students.

The involvement of parents of at-risk children in their child's education continued to be limited, despite innovative efforts at some of the schools visited by OREA, and in some circumstances may not even be advisable. However, a number of suggestions to improve the level of involvement were made.

Based on their findings, evaluators concluded that intervention services and consistent support from professional staff are vital for at-risk youth. Furthermore, peer programs are effective prevention strategies, but need to be supported by district administrators, school staff, and parents, and efforts to involve both teachers and parents in substance abuse prevention need to be increased. Their recommendations include the following:

- Expand and strengthen intervention counseling as a long-term service by making greater efforts to increase school administration's and staff's support of SAPIS' efforts. In addition, increase the availability of family counseling services to offer an important source of support for many needy families. Continually upgrade SAPIS' counseling skills.

- Explore additional and/or alternative ways of helping those students who gave low assessments of their progress even after many weeks of counseling services. These students are hardest to reach, and efforts need to be made to find appropriate new approaches.

- Give middle school students particular attention, since they demonstrate more negative behavior than students at other levels, and are potential early school drop-outs.

- Make greater efforts to communicate to school staff the results of effective peer programs to enlist their support for and understanding of the role of peer programs.

- Offer a more thorough orientation on their purposes and activities of the SPARK Peer Players to high school SPARK staff in order to enlist their participation and post-program follow-up, including seeking out the students who identified themselves as in need of services during workshops.

- Require teachers to participate in a training or in-service substance abuse prevention course, as well as take a more active role during substance abuse prevention lessons offered by SAPIS, in order to increase their knowledge and awareness of the issues.

- Increase efforts to bring parents into the school by focusing on the activities that most interest the parents themselves. To counter the feelings of alienation felt by some parents, as well as children, pleasurable activities that draw them together could be planned, such as trips or cultural events. School staff's attention to the manner in which they relate to parents, and outreach efforts to non-English speaking parents, should also be carefully considered.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the Research Unit of the New York City Public School system's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment (OREA). As with all of OREA's reports, it represents the contributions of many people.

The report results from a study requested by the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools. The support and assistance Vincent Giordano and Ellen Shelton of the Division of Student Support Services were vital for this study. The design for the research was developed, and the data collection and analysis directed by Joanna Gould-Stuart, Ph.D. Support and input from Mabel Payne, Research Unit Manager, is greatly appreciated.

Special thanks go to the students who completed a self-administered survey about themselves in a cooperative and forthcoming manner. Many thanks go to their Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) who supported this study. We are also grateful to those people who described their work in substance abuse prevention: directors of community school district substance abuse prevention programs, high school SPARK program staff, SAPIS, principals, and SPARK Peer Players and their directing staff. Thanks are also extended to students who gave their feedback on the SPARK Peer Players' performance, and to teachers who completed a self-administered questionnaire.

Many thanks to Adeola Joda who organized the data for analysis and gave technical assistance throughout the study and to James Reeves for data entry. Much gratitude is owed to Ravi Kolluru, who analyzed the quantitative data in this study.

OREA field staff collected and analyzed the data on the field study schools for this report. Special recognition is given to Margaret Schehl, Jessica Colley, Patricia DeArcy, and Lynne Manzo for their role in collecting and analyzing field data.

Margaret Schehl was the main writer on the high school SPARK peer programs and SPARK Peer Players in Chapter IV. Jessica Colley and Patricia DeArcy prepared the data used in Chapter V, as well as in the section on peer programs in Chapter IV. Thanks goes to Carol Meyer for her editorial assistance. Joanna Gould-Stuart was responsible for the final analysis and writing of this report.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Executive Summary	i
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Tables and Charts	vi
I. Introduction	1
Background	1
The Current Study	4
Scope of This Report	7
II. Survey of Students Receiving Intervention Services	8
Background	8
The Survey Sample	9
Student Responses	13
Analysis of Survey Responses	23
III. Peer Leadership Programs	30
Introduction	30
Elementary and Middle School Peer Programs	30
The SPARK Peer Program	32
The SPARK Peer Players: Prevention Through Theater	35
IV. School Staff and Parent Involvement	52
School Staff Involvement	52
Parent Involvement	58
V. Conclusions and Recommendations	64
Intervention Services	64
Peer Programs	66
Staff Development	67
Parent Involvement	68
Recommendations	69

LIST OF TABLES AND CHARTS

Table		Page
1.	Characteristics of 1991-92 Sample Schools	5
2.	Schools and Students Participating in the Survey, by School Level	11
3.	Reasons for Referral of Students Listed on School Rosters	12
4.	Students' Views of Progress in School Performance Since Participating in Counseling Services	14
5.	Students' Views of Self Since Participating in Counseling Services	17
6.	Students' Views of Progress in Life Skills Since Participating in Counseling Services	20
7.	Students' Views of Helpfulness of Counseling Program	20
8.	Percentage of Students with Survey Scores Above the Median by Grade	24
9.	Students' Total Survey Scores by Students' Characteristics	26
10.	Students' Total Survey Scores by Students' Service Characteristics	27

Chart

1.	Students' Total Survey Scores by Weeks in Counseling Services	28

I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Goals of the Three-Year Study

This report presents the findings from the second year (1991-92) of a three-year study of substance abuse prevention and intervention programs in New York City's public schools. This study, which was requested by the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, is being conducted by the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA). The goals of the three-year study are to:

- document the number and kinds of substance abuse prevention and intervention services provided to students in New York City's public schools;
- describe the most effective practices in substance abuse prevention;
- describe the obstacles faced by service providers and offer recommendations for overcoming these obstacles; and
- assess the progress of a sample of students who have received substance abuse intervention services over a two-year period.

The 1990-91 Study

The first year's study (1990-91) consisted of two parts. The first part was a field study of 27 substance abuse prevention and intervention services that had been identified by district directors of prevention programs as exemplary. The services were provided in 19 elementary and middle schools in 17 community school districts, and five high schools (one from each borough). The findings of the study were presented in a report titled Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs In New York City Schools (OREA, 1992).

The second part of the 1990-91 study was a survey of all New York City public schools to determine the number and types of services provided throughout the school system. The results of the study are presented in a report titled Substance Abuse Prevention Services in the New York City Public Schools: Survey Results 1990-91 (OREA, 1993).

The findings of both parts of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Schools vary considerably in the organization, staffing, and delivery of substance abuse prevention and intervention services to students, and in the degree of staff development offered to teachers and other school staff.

- The most effective programs offer a wide range of prevention and intervention services, including classroom prevention lessons that provide information about drugs and teach skills that help children to refuse drugs; rap groups; peer leadership programs; group and individual counseling; and parent involvement.

- In general, Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS)* have succeeded in reaching at-risk students in a direct, nonbureaucratic manner that has made a positive difference in their lives.

- Most directors and SAPIS feel that counseling services are the core of their program, but face obstacles to providing these services, including insufficient time to provide the services and to consult with other professionals about particular cases.

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*Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) are hired by the director of their community school district's substance abuse prevention and intervention program, and are employed at three salary levels based on their job responsibilities. SAPIS provide direct services, including classroom prevention lessons, intervention counseling services, peer leadership, staff development, and services to parents, such as workshops and counseling.

- SAPIS are most effective when they have the support and cooperation of school administrators, teachers, and noninstructional staff.

- Teachers who participate in staff development offered by SAPIS incorporate prevention concepts into their regular classroom lessons and refer at-risk students to intervention services more frequently than teachers who have not participated in such training, although the percentage of teachers (about 40 percent) who reported making referrals and incorporating prevention concepts was not as high as desired.

- Peer programs are an effective strategy for reaching out to at-risk students and for providing leadership opportunities for the peers themselves.

- Parent involvement in family counseling, parent workshops, and parent leadership training is important but remains difficult to achieve.

- Linkages with other districtwide programs and with community institutions, local businesses, and the police strengthen districts' prevention programs.

- Space limitations sometimes limit the types of services that can be provided to students and parents.

As a result of these findings, the evaluators conducting the study recommended that:

- the Substance Abuse Prevention Program of the Division of Student Support Services disseminate more information about prevention programs to community school district superintendents and school principals to enlist their understanding and support;

- directors of district substance abuse programs maintain a greater presence in schools in order to help SAPIS with case consultations and in developing linkages to community-based agencies, and to facilitate additional training and inter-district communication among SAPIS;

- SAPIS provide additional support and guidance to peer leaders; and

- teachers who have participated in SAPIS-led staff development sessions, and are applying what they have learned, encourage other teachers to participate more actively in prevention efforts.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Schools Included in the Study

The 24 schools included in the 1990-91 study generally offered greater than the average number of substance abuse prevention and intervention services for all city schools at their corresponding level (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school). In order to include some schools that offered fewer than the mean number of services provided by the 1990-91 school sample, OREA expanded its sample in 1991-92 to include 14 new elementary and middle schools (representing 13 newly participating community school districts) and four new high schools (each one from a different borough). Table 1 presents some of the characteristics of these schools. The sample schools are representative of the city's public schools with respect to their frequency of Chapter 1 status, number of students enrolled, and number of SAPIS services offered. The mean number of years that SAPIS worked in their schools is 3-1/2 less for the 1991-92 sample than for the 1990-91 sample, but no data on years employed are available for all schools' SAPIS.*

Structure of the Study

In the first part of the current study, evaluators analyzed data for 891 students who had received intervention counseling services in 1991-92 and had completed a self-administered survey designed to elicit their assessments of their own progress in

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*Data were obtained from the School Profiles maintained by OREA, as well as from information provided by the SAPIS in these schools.

Table 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF 1991-92 SAMPLE SCHOOLS

	School Level			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Number of Schools	17	16	9	41
Number of Chapter 1 Schools	12	11	2	25
Range of Number of Students Registered in Schools	41-1,478	777-1,634	1,200-3,463	
Mean Number of SAPIS Services Offered in 1990-91 Citywide	6.5	8.1	7.3	6.9
Mean Number of SAPIS Services Offered in Sample Schools	7	7.7	7.8	7.4
Mean Number of Years SAPIS Worked in Schools[a]	2.8	4.4	3.4	3.4

[a] The numbers of SAPIS for whom data were available were 15 for elementary, 16 for middle, and 7 for high schools, respectively.

- Approximately 61 percent of the total 1990-1991 sample were Chapter 1 schools. The overall average number of SAPIS services offered citywide, in 1990-1991, was 6.9, while the average number of services in the sample schools for that year was 7.4. The average number of years that SAPIS worked in the schools,in the 1990-1991 sample, was 3.4.

school performance, acquiring life skills (such as dealing with anger and making decisions), and improving self-esteem. The survey also aimed to reveal how students' responses differ according to individual, service, or school characteristics. Some of these students attended schools that had participated in the 1990-91 study and may have received services that year as well.* The final year of the three-year study (1992-93) will follow up on student survey respondents in the 1991-92 school year.

The second part of the present study was designed to focus on selected components of substance abuse prevention programs, including peer leadership programs, the activities of the SPARK** Peer Players (a group of college students who present theatrical performances for high school students), teacher staff development, and parent involvement. A sample of field study schools included five elementary, three middle, and four high schools representing all boroughs and a diversity of racial, ethnic, and economic characteristics. All twelve schools were new participants in the study. OREA's evaluation efforts included:

- interviews with the 12 directors of district substance abuse prevention and intervention programs responsible for the schools visited by evaluators, plus one SAPIS and the principal in each sample school, focusing on the strengths

*Because data on many of these students' previous year's participation were unavailable, their length of participation in 1990-91 was not included in the current analysis.

**SPARK is the name of the New York City High School's substance abuse prevention and intervention program.

and weaknesses of peer programs, staff development, and parent involvement efforts in the school;

- an interview with the director of the high school SPARK program, plus a focus group with SPARK borough supervisors, also focusing on peer programs, staff development, and parent involvement;

- observation of eight SPARK Peer Player performances and the workshops that followed them in four high schools, analysis of 259 feedback forms completed by high school students in the audience, and one focus group with eight of the SPARK Peer Players and another with SPARK Peer Player staff members to determine the strengths of a theatrical approach to substance abuse prevention and the difficulties faced in implementing this program component; and

- analysis of 109 self-administered teacher questionnaires about substance abuse prevention staff development.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

Chapter II presents the results of the survey of students participating in intervention counseling. Chapter III discusses the SPARK Peer Players' role in the high school substance abuse prevention program, and Chapter IV describes staff development offered by SAPIS and parent outreach efforts. Chapter V offers evaluators' conclusions and recommendations based on the data analyzed in this report.

II. SURVEY OF STUDENTS RECEIVING INTERVENTION SERVICES

BACKGROUND

Students are referred to intervention services (that is, individual or group counseling) when they are identified as experiencing various kinds of problems (academic, attendance, family, or personal), or as abusing substances or exhibiting maladaptive behavior. They either refer themselves or are referred by someone else (teacher, guidance counselor, principal, or friend) to their school's SAPIS.

Both individual and group counseling are typically provided once a week to help these students learn to deal with their problems and develop into more positive, productive, and healthy young people. Directors of substance abuse prevention/ intervention programs described the purposes of these intervention counseling services as follows:

> Intervention involves short-term counseling which addresses at-risk students before the onset of severe problems. It involves getting at the core of why kids are at risk--why they are conflicted and working through those particular issues. [It] aims to get students to deal with ongoing problems and get over them, to change their behavior.

> Students are given the opportunity to identify and deal with their feelings, have self-respect and treat others with respect, realize that their family problems are not their fault, feel hope and know they can survive, feel loved and proud of who they are, learn to protect their health, understand what addiction is, and set and reach goals.

A counseling group is usually comprised of five to 15 students, and may be mixed by age, grade, sex, and presenting problem. Group counseling for children of alcoholic parents

(COA) or children of substance abusers (COSA) centers on helping them realize that they are not responsible for the problems in their families, and on helping them cope better at home. While these groups are intended to allow students to share their problems with others who understand what they experience, many also include non-COA/COSA children.

According to program directors and SAPIS interviewed by OREA, the groups function in an "informal, intimate setting that allows free expression," and may involve a variety of approaches, including discussion, role playing, lectures, art, music, theater, poetry, trust and relaxation exercises, field trips, and videos. The SAPIS' skill in guiding participants to develop "trust, sharing, friendship, and a nonjudgmental attitude" is important for the effectiveness of group counseling.

Data on group counseling services provided in the citywide survey for school year 1990-91 indicate that group counseling services were offered in 43 percent of elementary, 73 percent of middle, and 92 percent of high schools in the New York City public school system. The present study examines how students who receive individual or group counseling view themselves and their progress as they receive these services. Data to address these questions were gathered from a self-administered survey completed by students during the 1991-92 school year.

THE SURVEY SAMPLE

SAPIS received school rosters (i.e., a list of all registered students) in March 1992, and identified those students

listed on the roster who were currently receiving group or individual counseling services. They did not list students who had received services earlier in the 1991-92 school year but had left the school or had already been terminated from services. OREA mailed a total of 1,155 surveys to SAPIS in 43 selected schools; these surveys were to be administered to the students identified on their school roster.

OREA provided training and follow-up assistance in survey administration to SAPIS in the sample schools. The training included a review of the questions to be read aloud to younger students and poorer readers, and a presentation of assurances of confidentiality to be conveyed to students. Two of the schools did not participate in the survey and were eliminated from the sample. SAPIS in the final 41 sample schools reported that their students were positive and cooperative about completing the survey forms.

With two schools dropped from the sample, the possible number of survey responses was reduced from 1,155 to 1,065. A total of 935 students responded to the survey.* Response rates per school ranged from as high as 100 percent to as low as 21.1 percent. One-third of the 41 participating schools returned surveys for more than 90 percent of the students receiving

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*Some of the students who had been slated for the survey had moved or been transferred to another school by the time that SAPIS administered the surveys, and many of the students were absent from school when the survey was administered. Furthermore, because the surveys were administered toward the end of the school year, SAPIS were pressed for time and unable to administer the survey to some of their currently enrolled students.

intervention services. Of the 935 surveys that were returned to OREA, 39 had an identification number that could not be matched with numbers on school rosters, and five surveys were incomplete, yielding a total of 891 usable surveys. Thus, 84 percent of the 1,065 surveys returned were complete and usable.

As Table 2 shows, the largest percentage of the 891 students came from the middle schools*. Survey data also showed that 59 percent of the respondents were girls and 41 percent were boys. Ages ranged from 6-19, with a mean age of 13-1/2 years. Respondents were in grades 1-12, with three in the first or second grade, and close to half in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Since 61 percent of the study schools had Chapter 1

Table 2

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY, BY SCHOOL LEVEL

	School Level			
	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Number of schools in study	17	16	8	41
Number of students who responded	222	425	244	891
Percentage of students who responded	25	48	27	100

• Almost half of the students completing the survey were from middle schools.

*This is because of the larger number of these schools in the sample compared to high schools, and because of the larger number of students in middle schools as compared to elementary schools, resulting in larger caseloads for middle school SAPIS.

status, it is very likely that the majority of student survey respondents were economically disadvantaged.

Reasons for Referral to Intervention Services

As part of the intake process, SAPIS are required to provide one to three reasons for each student's referral. As indicated on the rosters provided to OREA, and summarized on Table 3, the most frequently cited main reason for referral to SAPIS services was family problems (325 cases), followed by maladaptive behavior (247 cases) and personal problems such as anxiety, peer pressure,

Table 3

REASONS FOR REFERRAL OF STUDENTS LISTED ON SCHOOL ROSTERS[a]

Reason	As Main Reason	As Any Reason
Family Problems	325	454
Maladaptive Behavior	247	286
Personal Problems	235	594
Substance Abuse/Use	199	231
Academic Problems	59	118
Truancy/Attendance	34	68
Other	7	42

[a]The total number of students for whom referral reasons were provided is greater than 891 because the total includes students who were identified by their SAPIS as receiving intervention services but who did not complete the survey.

- The mean reason that students were referred for individual or group counseling by SAPIS was family problems.

and poor self-image (235 cases). When additional reasons for referral were included, as they were in 55 percent of the cases, the most frequent reason for referral was personal problems (594 cases), followed by family problems (454 cases), maladaptive behavior (286 cases), and substance abuse/use (231 cases).

SAPIS who were interviewed in 1990-91 about their students in intervention counseling services had pointed out, however, that the problems that students reveal in their initial contact with the SAPIS are very often only part of the story; other reasons frequently come to the surface once students start receiving counseling services. Thus, the "official" reasons for referral do not, they maintained, "tell the whole story."

One principal interviewed in the 1991-92 field study felt that students' problems are partly created by schools which "are too large and [where] kids lose their identity." Another looked outside of the school, noting that "poverty, poor skills, lack of health facilities or adequate housing, abusive and dysfunctional families, single parent homes, mobility, and crime" are all major problems that students confront. High school SPARK program intervention specialists identified other problems, including negative peer pressure, violence, racism, and inferior education.

STUDENT RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Self-administered questionnaire responses were aggregated for an analysis of students' views of changes in their school performance, self-esteem, and life skills since they began counseling. The analysis also focused on what students reported

learning in school about drugs and alcohol and how the program had been helpful to them.

School Performance

Students provided a self-assessment of their progress in school performance since they started receiving counseling services. As shown in Table 4, their responses were quite consistent: between 30 and 50 percent of survey respondents reported improvement in such areas as grades, relationships with teachers, and class work, while about the same percentages reported no changes in these areas. Less than eight percent indicated that their performance in any of these areas had

Table 4

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF PROGRESS IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES

School Performance	Positive Improvement %	No Change %	Worsened Performance %	Not Sure %	No Reply %
Grades	49.7	33.9	6.1	10.1	.2
Relationships with Teachers	46.6	36.5	6.5	9.5	.9
Classwork	43.9	44.6	4.4	6.8	.3
Attendance	37.3	44.8	2.7	15.0	.2
Homework	35.7	49.0	6.4	7.7	1.1
Latenesses	33.3	48.3	7.7	9.3	1.3
Cutting Class	30.4	44.0	8.0	16.4	1.2
	Feels Proud	Feels Okay	Not satisfied	Not Sure	No Reply
Overall Progress	32.1	46.2	14.6	6.6	.4

- At least 30 percent but no more than half of student survey respondents reported improvement in several areas since they began participating in counseling services, while approximately the same percentages of students reported no changes.

declined, while the remainder either indicated that they were not sure, or did not answer the question.

That relationships with teachers have improved for a large percentage of the surveyed students suggests that counseling services are successfully addressing an important problem that many at-risk youth face: dealing with authority. In addition, about one-third of the students indicated that they felt proud of their progress in their school work, slightly less than one-half felt that it was "OK," and 15 percent said that they were not satisfied with it.

Another survey question asked respondents how important they believed it was to be a good student. More than four-fifths (81 percent) reported that this was "very" important or "pretty" important to them. Similarly, when asked about their future plans, 83 percent wrote that they expected to attend college, with 40 percent of these students planning to attend graduate school. (Similar reports of high aspirations coupled with at-risk behavior have been seen in many youth studies, suggesting that some students have an unrealistic view of what it takes to achieve their goals.)

Nearly half of the survey respondents wrote comments about how the program had helped them with their school performance, including the following:

> This program has helped me with teachers that I never got along with before.
>
> Now I get my homework right.
>
> My grades have gone up.
>
> It has helped me stay out of the hallways and not cut.
>
> I stopped staying out late; I stopped cutting class.
>
> It makes me like school and look forward to coming.

Self-esteem and Life Skills

Students were also asked a number of closely related questions about their view of themselves since participating in counseling, their progress in various kinds of "life skills" such as dealing with anger and coping with stress, and the degree to which the program had helped them gain these life skills.

Table 5 summarizes students' responses to both positively and negatively phrased questions about their views of themselves. More than 70 percent of the students indicated that they looked forward to the future "most of the time," 55 percent felt good about how they acted most of the time, and between 85 and 90 percent indicated that either "most of the time" or "once in a while," they made positive decisions, were able to talk about problems, were able to cope with difficulties, and liked themselves better as a result of counseling services.

Students' responses to the negatively phrased questions were to some degree mirror images of their responses to the positively phrased questions. About one-fourth of the students indicated that "most of the time" they did things they should not*; nearly

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*These behaviors undoubtedly included those stipulated in response to another question elsewhere in the survey, which asked students how often they did particular types of things. More than 80 percent of the students reported skipping their homework assignment at least once or twice during the school year; more than one-half reported such behaviors as getting into a fight or lying to their parent or guardian about their whereabouts; more than 40 percent reported cutting classes, being truant, or being referred to a dean, A.P., or principal; 30 percent reported purposely damaging someone else's property or doing something illegal at least once or twice during the school year; and 22 percent reported being suspended or placed on probation at least once during the school year. By contrast, 54 percent reported trying out for a school activity (such as a sports team, play, or choir); 50 percent said that they went to a library outside of the school; and 60 percent said that they read a book from beginning to end that was not related to their schoolwork at least once during the school year.

Table 5

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF SELF SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES

DO/ARE YOU...?	Most of the Time %	Once in a While %	Just About Never %	No Reply %
Look forward to the future	71.4	18.9	6.6	3.1
Feel good about how you act	55.0	34.7	8.1	2.2
Make positive decisions	48.9	36.7	9.8	4.6
Able to talk about problems	48.5	33.8	14.9	2.8
Cope with difficulties	44.6	40.5	10.5	4.3
Like yourself more	42.8	38.7	2.2	.3
Do things you shouldn't	25.8	53.2	18.6	2.4
Not as smart as other kids	19.9	42.8	34.0	3.3
Think life is full of problems	19.9	46.8	29.7	3.7
Unhappy with yourself	16.7	54.4	25.9	2.9
Dissatisfied with behavior	15.4	48.4	32.5	3.7
Have no talent	11.0	30.5	54.2	4.2

- More than 70 percent of the surveyed students said that they looked forward to the future, and 55 percent felt good about how they acted most of the time. Conversely, about 25 percent of the respondents admitted that, most of the time, they did things they shouldn't.

20 percent thought they were not as smart as others their age or that life is full of problems without solutions; and roughly 16 percent were unhappy with themselves or dissatisfied with their behavior "most of the time." In assessing this latter group of responses, however, it is important to note that roughly half of the students only acted or felt this way "once in a while," and that substantial percentages of this at-risk population "just about never" had these negative feelings about themselves.

Some students made additional comments on how the program had helped them to feel more positive about themselves, including the following:

> [It] made me feel better knowing that people besides my parents care for me.
>
> It's made me feel that there are more positive ways rather than negative. Lets me see that I am not the only one in pain.
>
> I have someone to tell my problems to; this program helps me realize that I have talent and stuff to live for.
>
> I see that everybody don't think that I am ugly.
>
> Well, it made me feel like I had people that were there to listen to me, and helped letting my feelings out.

However, it should also be noted that some students also noted feeling "confused" or "depressed," and about one-third of the students said they had thought of harming themselves (although not necessarily since entering counseling services). A large majority (70 percent) of these students were girls.

By contrast, several students commented at the end of their survey that the program had in fact kept them from committing suicide. One stated: "[It] helped me from killing myself; helped me to explain myself more." Another wrote: "I no longer wanted to kill myself; I went to an outside therapist." A third revealed: "I was thinking of suicide but talking with the SPARK

counselor changed my mind." It is difficult to interpret these findings, however, since suicidal ideation is thought to occur among large numbers of teenagers, and not just among those at risk for substance abuse.

Tables 6 and 7 indicate students' responses to questions regarding specific life skills, such as dealing with anger and conflict, making decisions and sticking to them, and coping with stress. On average, about 50 percent of the students felt that dealing with these problems had become easier (Table 6), and well over 50 percent reported that the program had been very helpful to them in the above-mentioned areas and in learning how to share their feelings and feel more self-confident (Table 7). Furthermore, about 80 percent of student respondents said, in another survey question, that they were feeling happier since they had been receiving SAPIS counseling, and were feeling less stress.

Many students made additional comments about how participation in counseling services had helped them improve their life skills. They stated that the program had helped them express their feelings, gain trust, tell the truth, behave appropriately with teachers, stop hanging out with gangs, understand their parents/guardians better, and deal with the death of loved ones.

Some students reported that being in the program helped them improve their "attitude." Others stated that they learned "to ignore enemies," "who not to talk to in the street," "to keep my mouth shut in class," and "stop getting into fights."

Other ways in which students reported being helped by the program include dealing with sex, "boys," pregnancy decisions, motherhood, peer pressure, and criminal activity. One student

Table 6
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF PROGRESS IN LIFE SKILLS
SINCE PARTICIPATING IN COUNSELING SERVICES

How has it been to...?	Easier %	No Change %	Harder %	Not Sure %	No Reply %
Deal with anger/conflict	54.0	25.5	8.5	11.3	.7
Make up your mind and stick to decisions	52.0	29.2	—[a]	16.8	2.0
Cope with stress	49.0	23.1	10.8	15.9	1.1

[a] The question about decision-making did not ask if students' ability had worsened since participation in counseling.

- About one-half of the students felt that they had made progress in several life skills since they had started receiving counseling.

Table 7
STUDENTS' VIEWS OF HELPFULNESS
OF COUNSELING PROGRAM

How helpful has counseling been in helping you	Very Helpful %	Kind of Helpful %	Not Helpful %	No Reply %
Cope with anger, conflict	49.0	40.5	8.2	2.2
Make positive decisions	56.2	37.9	3.8	2.0
Cope with stress	43.4	43.8	10.2	2.6
Share your feelings	57.0	33.9	6.8	2.2
Feel more self-confident	57.2	32.4	7.6	2.7

- More than 50 percent of the students felt that the program had been very helpful in several life-skills areas.

wrote: "When people want me to do something stupid, I don't do it." Another wrote that it helped him/her "stop stealing." Still another boy stated, "It helped me not to beat the sh___ out of my girl."

Learning about Drugs and Alcohol

Almost all (94 percent) of the student survey respondents reported that they had learned about the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol in school during the 1991-92 year, and 65 percent had changed their way of thinking about drugs and alcohol during the year. Asked if they used what they learned in school about drugs and alcohol in making decisions in their personal lives, 79 percent responded positively, 11 percent negatively, and the remainder were not sure.

Additional comments on this aspect of the program included the following:

> It helped me cut down on drinking alcohol. I haven't drank in months.
>
> I stopped smoking.
>
> This program helped me deal with an alcoholic parent. I was able to talk about problems [I had] when I was younger.
>
> I learned to say no and to change the subject when somebody offered me drugs.
>
> [The program helped me] to quit drugs and alcohol, to stop hanging out with gangs, to help me deal with my aunt who is dying of AIDS.

Family and Household Relations

About one-half (49 percent) of the respondents reported living with one parent, and nearly two-fifths (39 percent) said they lived with two parents. Twelve percent were not living with

any parent; of these, about half lived with foster parents or other nonrelatives.

About two-fifths (41 per-cent) of the student survey respondents said that they lived in a household with four or five people (41 percent), another one-fifth (19 percent) said they lived in a household with six or seven people, and 13 percent said they lived with eight or more people. (Those with the largest numbers of household members were assumed to live in group homes.) Only 25 percent lived with three or fewer people.

Getting along with their family at home had become easier since participating in the program for 38 percent of the student respondents, while only a small proportion (nine percent) felt it had gotten harder; the remainder either said the situation had stayed about the same (45 percent) or weren't sure (7 percent).

A number of students wrote positive comments about how the program had helped them in their relationships at home, including the following:

[It taught me] to share my bad feelings with my family.

It helped me to be honest with my mother about my problems.

It helped me understand my parents more.

I learned how to cope with my stepfather.

About one-third (30 percent) said their parent or guardian was proud of their progress in school since they had started participating in the program, while about one-quarter each either indicated that the parent felt that their progress was "OK" or didn't say anything about it. A small number (44) of students

reported comments that their parent/guardian had made about their progress in school. These remarks ranged from reinforcing statements such as "Excellent" and "You've improved" to more negative comments such as "You could do better," "It's about time," "Your life's a mess," [it's a] waste of time," and "It sucks."

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Scoring Survey Responses

In order to obtain some measure of how the students viewed themselves in all survey areas combined, evaluators gave a numerical value to students' responses to questions about school performance, self-esteem, and life skills in order to obtain a "total survey score." For example, for the question about a change in attendance since starting the program, the response "it has gotten better" was given a value of 2, the answer "it hasn't changed" was given the value of 1, the answer "it has gotten worse" was given a value of 0, and the answer "I'm not sure" was not included in the count. The lowest possible total survey score that a student could obtain was "0." The highest possible score, 56, could be obtained by a student who gave the most positive answers to all questions. The total scores calculated by evaluators ranged from 5 to 45; the overall median score was 29.

As can be seen in Table 8, a larger proportion of students in grades 11 and 12 (64 percent) scored above the median than did students in other grade groupings, which may suggest that age,

maturity, and closeness to graduation may positively affect these students' perceptions of their progress.

Differences by Student Characteristics

Analysts also divided the students into four quartiles based on their total survey score, with approximately 225 students in each quartile. As indicated in Table 9, the lowest quartile included students with scores between 5 and 24; the second quartile included students with scores between 25 and 28; the third quartile included students with scores between 29 and 33; and the highest quartile included students with scores between 34 and 45. Analysts then examined various characteristics of the students in each quartile.

Table 8

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH SURVEY SCORES ABOVE THE MEDIAN BY GRADE

Grade	N	Total Score %
1-4	92	48
5-6	169	56
7-8	317	51
9-10	168	46
11-12	145	64

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the students in the eleventh or twelfth grade scored above the median.

As indicated on the table, there were no substantial differences between students on the basis of sex, grade, number of parents, or number of persons in the student's household. For example, 25 percent of the girls and 26 percent of the boys fell into the lowest quartile, while 24 percent of the girls and 25 percent of the boys fell into the highest quartile. This finding is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that only one-third of the SAPIS offering intervention services in the study schools were males--a fact that some directors have suggested should be remedied since they believe that male SAPIS may be needed in order to make a greater positive impact on male students.

The distributions by grade were similar, although slightly greater percentages of 11th and 12th graders scored in the two upper quartiles (30 and 31 percent, respectively) compared with students in the other grade groups. The number of parents or the number of persons in the household also had little impact on students' survey scores.

Differences by Service Characteristics

Finally, analysts sought to determine whether the types of services and length of time that services were received by students affected their total survey scores. As indicated in Table 10, the type of counseling received--individual or group--had no significant impact on students' self-ratings regarding school performance, life skills, and self-esteem. Roughly the

Table 9

STUDENTS' TOTAL SURVEY SCORES
BY STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Individuals' Characteristics	Total Scores 5-24 %	25-28 %	29-33 %	34-45 %
Sex				
Girl	25	21	30	24
Boy	26	24	25	25
Grade				
1-4	32	21	26	22
5-6	24	20	31	25
7-8	27	22	28	23
9-10	32	21	26	21
11-12	13	23	30	31
Number of Parents				
0	27	22	22	29
1	27	22	26	26
2	23	23	32	22
Number in Household				
2	25	26	20	29
3	25	22	29	23
4-5	26	18	28	27
6-7	21	28	29	22
8-34[a]	26	23	30	21

[a]Some of these students probably live in a group home.

- Gender, grade, number of parents at home, and total number of persons in the household had little impact on the distribution of students who had low, intermediate, or high scores on the self-measures of school performance, life skills, and self-esteem.

same percentages had scores in each of the four quartiles for both types of counseling.

Table 10 and Chart 1 do reveal, however, that the number of weeks of counseling services did impact significantly on how positively students rated themselves in the several areas indicated. As shown in the table and chart, the largest percentage of students who scored in the lowest quartile (34 percent) had received 12 or fewer weeks of counseling, and conversely, the largest percentage of students who scored in the highest quartile (37 percent) had received services for between 29 and 40 weeks. This finding suggests that the longer students received group and/or individual counseling, the more positively

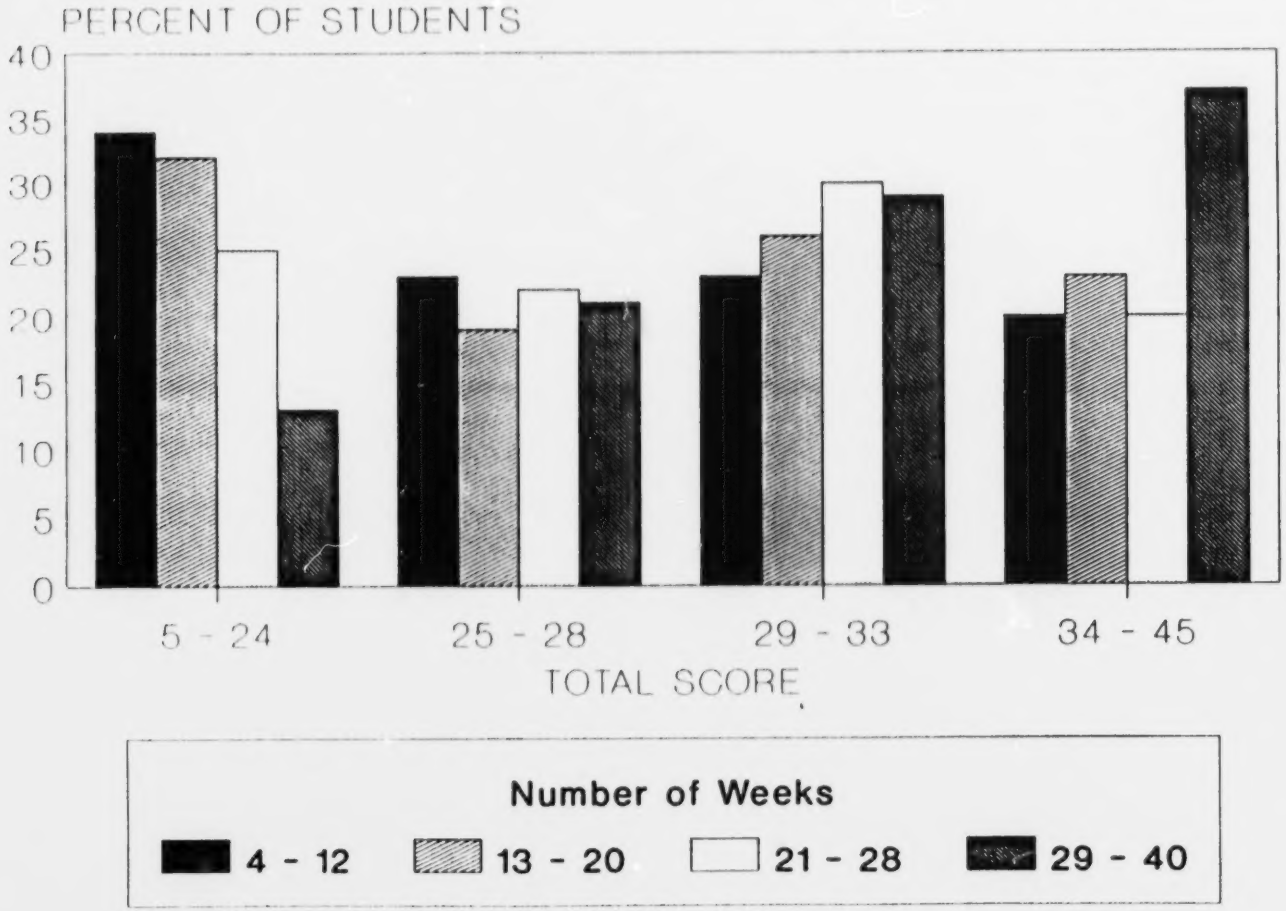
Table 10

STUDENTS' TOTAL SURVEY SCORES
BY STUDENTS' SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS

Service Characteristics	Total Scores 5-24 %	25-28 %	29-33 %	34-45 %
Type of Counseling				
Group	26	21	28	28
Individual	29	21	25	24
Number of Weeks in Counseling				
4-12	34	23	23	20
13-20	32	19	26	23
21-28	25	22	30	20
29-40	13	21	29	37

- Type of counseling received had little impact on the distribution of students' survey scores, but the number of weeks of counseling received did affect the distribution.

STUDENTS' TOTAL SURVEY SCORES BY WEEKS IN COUNSELING SERVICES



they rated themselves in terms of school performance, life skills, and self-esteem.*

Additional analyses revealed that almost half (49 percent) of the eleventh and twelfth graders who completed the survey had been receiving counseling services for more than 25 weeks, compared to between seven and 18 percent of the students in the other grades. However, there was no significant correlation between grade and total survey score.

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*Because SAPIS begin new groups and new individual counseling cases throughout the year, the number of weeks that students had been receiving services reflects the counseling schedules and timetables of the SAPIS. Some may have recently begun new groups or individual consultations, while others may not yet have terminated cases they had been working with for a long time. Note also that in some cases, SAPIS may not have identified when students actually began services if the SAPIS were new in their schools and, for some reason, did not have access to records for the previous year.

III. PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

"I used to want only to survive; now I have dreams."
(SPARK Peer Player)

INTRODUCTION

Peer leadership programs are based on the understanding that children are very much influenced by their peers, and that peers who serve as positive role models can in fact provide prevention services to a potentially large number of students. As one director who was interviewed in the 1991-92 field study noted:

> Children [particularly] on the junior high and high school level listen to each other; it's good for them to be able to see other children who are successful and able to overcome their problems. It lets them know that they can do it too.

Peer leaders themselves may be at-risk students whose participation in peer activities is, in fact, a prevention strategy. Peer programs aim to build participants' self-esteem, develop leadership skills, and teach conflict resolution skills. They empower students by building on their strengths, and allow them to develop empathy as they serve as helpers and role models for other children who are experiencing problems. Thus, peer programs are both prevention and intervention strategies; peers deal with their own problems as they become positive influences on other students in school.

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL PEER PROGRAMS

According to the 1990-91 citywide survey, one-third of elementary and two-thirds of middle schools have instituted peer leadership programs. Peer leaders are usually selected by SAPIS

or recommended by school staff. Students who are selected "care about and are able to talk to other kids," according to one interviewed SAPIS. In some middle schools, students receive peer leadership classroom training before conducting peer activities, which include giving guest presentations to elementary school classes, organizing school-wide drug-free mini-school days and essay and poster contests, and participating in community media shows (Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs: The Citywide Survey, OREA, 1993).

Two of the elementary and middle schools visited by OREA in the 1991-92 field study had SAPIS-organized peer programs. The peers were involved in positive alternatives, role playing, and playwriting. In two other schools the principal or assistant principal organized a peer program, including positive alternatives, a student council, and peer tutoring. Staff in the four schools that did not offer peer programs expressed the desire to implement them.

SAPIS in the field study schools reported facing several problems in running peer programs. One was that there was too little time within the class period to conduct some of the peer leadership activities in an in-depth manner. At the same time, they disliked pulling their students out of their classrooms, and found it difficult to arrange time to work with the children after school because of parental opposition.

One SAPIS reported that peer programs sometimes got labeled as being for "goody-goody kids," and that there was a need to

communicate that the program was for all children. She pointed out that it can be highly positive to engage negative students in the peer program: "Turning around a child who is a negative leader, that is, a 'school thug'. . . it's phenomenal what happens!" Another SAPIS stated:

> There's something to be said about having negative leadership along with the G.O. leader--there's a part for them too. The positive student may have an impact on the negative leader.

Effective Program Features in Elementary and Middle Schools

Interviewees in the elementary and middle schools identified three criteria for effective school-based peer programs:

- the support of the district superintendent and school personnel in order to obtain necessary resources such as transportation, their cooperation as SAPIS take students out of class, and their acceptance of their peers' choices of activities;
- parents' understanding and acceptance of the importance of their child's missing a class or staying after school for peer involvement; and
- specialized knowledge and skills on the part of peer leadership staff members. Such leaders must be child-oriented, strong without being intrusive, able to foster a well-structured autonomy for the children, and honest and sensitive with students. As one SAPIS stated:

> "If peer leadership programs are run with adult ideas of projects and action, the kids are bored. When kids state that this is the way things should be, the level of involvement and energy is high. Basically, you need staff members who know how to sit down with and communicate to kids . . . capable, in-tune staff."

THE SPARK PEER PROGRAM

The high school SPARK peer program is more fully developed than peer programs in elementary and middle schools. Nearly half

of all high schools responding to the citywide survey reported having a peer program, and 25 high schools had a comprehensive peer program with a full-time SPARK peer specialist. Almost as many referrals for the SPARK peer program come from students themselves or students who are already peer leaders as from SPARK or school staff (Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City, OREA, 1992), in contrast to the other school levels, where most referrals come from staff members.

Peer Training

In high schools with full-time peer specialists, peers participate in training five days per week for a term, for which they receive high school credit. The training includes leadership skills, issues of confidentiality and ethics, prevention and intervention skills, and organizational skills in order to perform a broad range of services. (In some high schools without a peer specialist, SPARK prevention or intervention counselors offer one or two fully scheduled peer training classes.)

According to the high school peer specialist interviewed, and her borough supervisor, peer training is the most difficult part of the program. The supervisor noted:

> The facilitator has to be part teacher and part social worker; [she/he] must use a certain amount of personal material to teach the skill but can't allow the personal matter to lead into a treatment program. Also, [she/he] doesn't want to "teach," such as [by giving] grades.

After training, some peers become peer "leaders" and others become peer "helpers," depending upon their abilities. Leaders

plan and implement peer-led school activities and events, while "helpers" work with students on an emotional level, in a counseling role or as a "buddy." Peer leaders and helpers also reach out to other youth programs and participate in citywide and statewide activities.

SPARK Peer Programs in the Field Study

Four high schools were visited for the 1991-92 field study; one of them had a full-time peer specialist. In the other three schools, SPARK counselors expressed the view that a peer specialist would be a welcome addition. One said, "Gangs and posses are substitute families; peer groups could serve the same purpose." SPARK peer program supervisory staff noted that it is difficult to expand peer programs into more high schools because of a lack of funds, as well as resistance in some schools.

> Peer programs are difficult to schedule; there is an issue of space; some schools already have peer activities and they see a doubling effect. Peer programs may need an office of their own and will need classroom space, [since] a full time specialist will run classes several times per week.

In the three high schools without a peer specialist, principals expressed reservations about the expanded peer program with a full-time peer specialist for their school. One stated that "kids are not as well trained as professionals; it's expensive in terms of time, and there are not enough specialists." In response to principals' reservations about peer programs, the director of the SPARK program asserted, "You have to constantly invite the administrators to see the training class for them to see the difference [peer programs make]."

THE SPARK PEER PLAYERS: PREVENTION THROUGH THEATER

Introduction

The SPARK Peer Players are a musical theatrical group whose members create and perform shows with prevention messages for high school student audiences. The Peer Players are members of the SPARK program's "peer alumni"--New York City public high school graduates, now in college, who provide peer services to high school students.

Interested students audition for the SPARK Peer Players, and if selected, they are trained, directed, and supervised by the Peer Player staff, comprised of actors, musicians, writers, and counselors. Peer Players work 20 hours each week while remaining in college. The players and some of the staff have first-hand experience with the problems high school students face.

In brainstorming workshops, the performers identify "real life" issues that they think are critical and, then, with the directors, develop skits and musical numbers using language that their audiences also use and understand. Skits and lyrics are set to music by the musical director. A packet is then sent out to all high schools describing what the SPARK Peer Players offer: a musical and theatrical performance followed by a workshop with audience participation. Interested principals call or write to request a performance.

The following description is a selection of observations from eight performances and workshops offered by thirteen SPARK Peer Players at four New York City high schools.

The Performance

Before the performance begins, the director introduces the school's SPARK counselor to the audience (usually about 100 students in an auditorium), gives the counselor's room location, and says that if anyone ever has any problems or just needs to talk, they should see her/him. She then tells the audience that some of the material in the show is fun, but some of it is disturbing, so they will have time to talk about some of the issues after the show. She also encourages them to discuss these and other relevant issues in their classes or with the SPARK counselor.

The intensity and tempo of the different skits and numbers vary, helping to keep the students' attention and providing periods of relief from the deep emotions stirred by the more serious pieces. Performance themes include AIDS/safe sex (from both the male and female perspective), drug dealing, gangs, violence, anger, teen pregnancy, poverty, family problems, depression/suicide, and alcoholism/substance abuse. The following come from some of the observed skits:

Skit 1

Three guys are hanging out. One of them, Cool Joey, starts boasting about his weekend with "the twins." He asks his friends how they spent their weekend. One of them says he spent the night with his girlfriend. "We talked all night long." Joey makes fun of him "talking."

(The audience laughs.)

JOEY'S FRIEND: She isn't ready, and I love her enough to wait.

Joey scoffs and makes fun of him. Joey asks the other friend what he did over the weekend. He says that he went out with a girl that he likes and they went back to his place where, when he realized they were going to have sex, he thought to himself "frisky is risky" and got out his wallet for his condom. Joey makes fun of him too.

(Until now, the audience is getting a big kick out of this skit, laughing a lot.)

The first friend says that he thinks a condom is a good idea; you can get diseases without it: "Look at Doreen." Joey says, "Doreen is hot!" The friend says, "Doreen has AIDS." Joey is disbelieving, angry. His friend says "Calm down; it's not as if you slept with her." Joey stands back, "So what if I did?" His friends are horrified. "You slept with Doreen? Hey, Joey, I think maybe you should see someone." Angry, Joey tells his friends to get lost: "Guys like me don't get AIDS."

(The audience isn't laughing anymore. The students are serious.)

Skit 2

A new skit begins in a family setting some time after the father has left the home. The mother is working two jobs trying to support the family. Her son, Tony, feels he needs to be the "man of the house," and her daughter, Tammy, hates school because her peers make fun of her clothes and make threatening remarks. The mother and Tammy are fighting about Tammy skipping school.

TAMMY: I'm not going back to that school.

MOTHER: I don't work two jobs to send you to have fun, I send you to get an education.

Tony is upset by their fighting, and wanting to solve the family problems, volunteers to get a job to help out his mother and enable his sister to get nicer clothes. The mother forbids him to get a job, telling him he has to finish high school first. Trying to keep the peace, and clearly concerned about both the demands on his mother and his sister's pain, Tony begins dealing drugs to get the extra money. Tony explains that violence is a big part of his job. To get the money he sometimes has to break legs.

TONY: I'm the man of the house now. All that matters is that I get paid. As for the police--well, I'm too slick to get caught. Anyway, it would be a first offense and I won't go to jail. I just want to get paid.

But Tony gets shot running from the cops.

TONY: I'm 17 years old and in jail. I'm alone and I can't sleep at night. I'm afraid. Get paid? Yeah, I got paid.

Skit 3

A second family skit opens with the mother, father, son, and daughter Danielle. The parents are listening to their son with smiles on their faces, hanging on his every word.

DANIELLE: I failed math.

Her parents are listening to their son, who is talking about the girl he's taking to the prom.

DANIELLE: Mom, I broke up with my boyfriend today.

MOTHER: That's nice, dear. (obviously not listening)

(The audience laughs.)

DANIELLE: Dad, I need the car.

The son is still talking about the prom.

FATHER: Not now, Danielle.

BROTHER: I'll need the car for the prom.

FATHER: No problem.

DANIELLE (to her brother): Can you help me with my math homework?

BROTHER: Not now.

He proceeds to talk about how he just got a 92 on his math exam. His parents praise him.

DANIELLE (shouting): I failed math! God, I failed math! Doesn't anyone hear me? Isn't anyone listening? I feel like I'm invisible. I might as well just disappear. Nobody would even miss me.

Later Danielle's brother talks to his friends about his sister. He doesn't know what's up with her--she failed her exam, and broke up with her boyfriend.

BROTHER: Well, I guess it's no big deal. That's just Danielle.

Later still he tells his friend that Danielle cracked up the car. Their father really yelled at her. She came up to her brother's room afterward and gave him her ring. She told him to give it to his girlfriend, that she wouldn't be needing it.

BROTHER: But that's just Danielle, I guess--no big deal.

He finds out later that she committed suicide.

BROTHER: Why didn't you come to me? All the signs--I guess it was a big deal.

Skit 4

The next skit concerns a girl who starts to carry a knife because she is afraid of her boyfriend's jealous ex-girlfriend.

Girl: I have to protect myself.

But one day she gets jumped by the other girl.

GIRL: She cut me with my own knife.

(The audience laughs.)

GIRL: (continuing after laughter): Now I carry a piece. I have to protect myself.

One day her younger brother finds the gun.

GIRL (to audience): The thing is, he must have thought it was a toy, because he shot himself with it.

(The audience gasps.)

GIRL: You don't know what it's like going back to that house with him gone. And my parents won't even talk to me any more.

The Workshop

The performance is over. It has gotten the students' attention, involving them emotionally and stimulating them to respond. Still standing on stage, each actor comes forward to give his/her real name, the name of the high school from which he/she graduated, and the college he/she is now attending. Each actor is met with enthusiastic applause.

The post-performance workshop is a dialogue between performers and audience, facilitated by the director. Students are invited to talk to any of the characters in the show, ask questions, or try to persuade a character to change his or her behavior. Students may also simply comment on any character with whom they could identify. The following are excerpts from observed workshops.

Workshop 1

A student asked Tony why he sold drugs if he wanted to be a responsible head of the family.

TONY: I wanted to help my family, and my mother wouldn't let me get a job.

ANOTHER STUDENT: Why should you worry about selling drugs if people want to buy them?

Some students laughed. The director, standing on stage, repeated the question, and asked if the student would feel that way if it was his little sister who was being sold the drugs.

Workshop 2

A male student in the audience asks Tony, "Why didn't you get a job, instead of dealing drugs?"

TONY: My mother wouldn't let me, because of school.

STUDENT: What about dealing drugs? That must take time from school.

TONY: I'm not in school anymore, I can't do both.

STUDENT: Then why not get a job?

TONY: My mother won't let me.

The director asked the student to come up to the stage and play the dealer's friend, trying to talk him out of dealing. "What advice would you give him?" The student was timid at first ("Me and my big mouth"), but finally agreed to try. Tony came up to him and said that he thought he had decided to take that job he was talking about.

STUDENT: What job?

TONY: You know, the one I told you about.

STUDENT: You mean dealing?

TONY: Yeah.

STUDENT: I don't think you should. What if you get caught?

TONY: Man, I'm the man of the house now. I have to take care of my family.

STUDENT: Then get a job.

TONY: My mother won't let me.

STUDENT: Oh, and she wants you to deal drugs?

TONY: It's a lot of money and I have to take care of my family.

STUDENT: What if you get caught?

TONY: Man, I won't.

STUDENT: You could get killed.

TONY: Man, I can take care of my family.

STUDENT: For how long? How long before you're arrested or killed?

The student acted with sincerity and confidence and the audience and the staff broke into spontaneous applause.

Workshop 3

It took some persuading, but finally a female student said she would like to talk to Danielle's family.

STUDENT: Why don't you listen to your daughter?

FATHER: We do listen to her. We love her. We love her brother. We listen to them both.

STUDENT: But why do you ignore her?

FATHER: We don't ignore her. We don't play favorites, she can talk to us . . . right, honey?

DANIELLE: Well. . . .

The father cuts her off.

STUDENT: You see, you don't give her a chance.

The director asked the audience if anyone has ever felt like Danielle, overwhelmed and not listened to. Three or four hands went up. She asked if anyone can tell the others about it. The same girl said she felt the same way with her family. Her sister had run away from home and her parents were only thinking about that and they were ignoring her.

DIRECTOR: What did you do?

STUDENT: I forced my mother to listen. I took her aside and told her how I felt. I asked them if they wanted me to act like my sister and they didn't, so they listened. Eventually, I went for counseling and it really helped.

Workshop 4

In this workshop, a male student confided that he had repeatedly tried to kill himself, beginning in junior high school.

STUDENT: I couldn't talk to anyone. I felt like I couldn't trust anyone. I didn't take care of myself. I stayed in the street. I would walk onto highways and hope to be hit by a car.

DIRECTOR: What happened to change that for you?

STUDENT: I went to the SPARK program and got counseling. That helped a lot, but I am still working on it. It is a day-by-day thing.

The director asked the audience if they could name the clues for suicide. The students responded: "Acting different," "Not talking to anyone," "Talking about death a lot," "Changing habits or appearance," and "Always alone."

DIRECTOR: What can you do for someone who shows these signs?

A FEMALE STUDENT: Say, 'I'll be there for you.'

The director explained that is good, but that it is a lot to take on: "What if the person committed suicide? You would feel responsible. If a friend of yours feels suicidal, you should get help for yourself; that's a lot to carry on your shoulders."

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Student Feedback

Evaluators distributed feedback forms to students at each performance, but only 259 were returned because students quickly leave the auditorium after a performance. When asked what new idea or fact they had learned from the program, the most common response was "Nothing. I knew everything."

Yet, when asked to indicate if their thinking had changed about HIV/AIDS, sex, teen pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, violence, weapons, their own behavior, their family situation, anger, sadness, or suicide, about 60 percent responded positively. Some students added that they had learned about handling pressure to have sex.

When asked what part of the program they found most useful, answers included teen pregnancy, violence, family issues, AIDS, and weapons. Some were more specific: "The part when the girl was walking with the gun and her brother shot himself;" "The part with the father leaving the family and the child didn't want to go to school;" "The rap about when the kid had AIDS."

As much as 34 percent of the respondents acknowledged that they identified with a character or situation in the performance. Among those they mentioned were the suicidal girl, the pregnant and parenting teens, the drug dealer, the alcoholic family, and the school drop-out.

About 80 percent of the respondents noted that they would not have changed anything in the program. The most frequently suggested changes were the outcomes of a character or situation.

One student wrote, "I wish he didn't kill the guy." Another commented, "Danielle should have screamed until she got the attention she wanted."

Almost half (47 percent) of the respondents reported that they would like to participate in other workshops. Asked to check which workshop topic they would like, students checked pregnancy, sex, AIDS, violence, family relationships and problems, and suicide. While fifty-nine percent of respondents reported that they had previously heard of the SPARK program, 65 percent indicated that they might be able to visit the SPARK program with their concerns.

Feedback from Player Staff, Players, and High School Staff

Rewards of the job. In focus groups which OREA evaluators conducted separately with nine Peer Players and four SPARK Peer Player staff members, both players and staff revealed that the best parts of their job are (1) making a connection with the kids, (2) achieving artistic excellence, and (3) personal development and awareness.

One Peer Player explained:

> The best thing about being a Peer Player is getting through to the kids. It is rewarding. When they stand up and say, "that is me," then you know you have connected with someone. . . . When students come and tell me that what happened to my character has happened to them, then I know I have reached them and I can talk to them and maybe get them to go to the SPARK office.

According to one staff member:

> The most important role for me is being a positive role model. As a paid professional in the music business, with my act together, they can see another young black man doing well, and it helps.

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Another reward is the satisfaction of achieving artistic excellence. The director stated:

> It is rewarding to see someone who has never acted, sung, or danced doing a sophisticated performance well. It is like no other feeling. It is an important artistic payback.

The Peer Players also enjoyed the "artistic payback." One said, "Being on stage and doing the performance is important in and of itself; now, after some experience, it is comfortable to perform on stage."

An interviewed principal commented: "I was very surprised, very impressed; they were so professional, so together; the kids were very talented." Another principal noted, "The kids were well-rehearsed, entertaining, focused, and more credible because they are peers."

Gains in personal development and awareness were also important rewards for Peer Player staff and players. According to one staff member: "The work, while difficult, helps us grow personally; we learn a lot about each other and ourselves." The camaraderie and friendship of the group members was also seen as a rewarding part of the job. According to a staff member, "We all take care of each other and like each other and that is important and helps."

Peer Players reported that when they began, they were facing the same problems as the students for whom they now perform, but that they had experienced significant growth through participation in the program. In many cases, being a Peer Player enabled them to discover what they wanted to do with their lives. "I

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live a lot cleaner life now," said one. "I don't experiment with recreational drugs anymore, don't smoke anymore."

Another player said:

> I've gone through a lot of changes. I feel like, oh my God, I have such responsibility. I don't know if I will be a singer or a doctor, but wherever I go, I'll be successful and help make a difference.

Another remarked, "I used to want only to survive; now I have dreams."

Problems and difficulties. Difficulties faced by Peer Players and staff include handling emotional stress and problems, transportation and space constraints, and dealing with a large bureaucratic system.

The players noted that it is often emotionally trying to do the performances and also deal with the feelings coming back at them from the audience. One stated, "Many of us have personal experience with these issues, and that can make the performance difficult." Another Player admitted, "I had a lot of problems when I first came here when they did a suicide thing because, let's say, I 'dabbled' in that in high school."

Another Peer Player pointed to the difficulty of what they were doing:

> We need more support and more understanding. We get up at 4:00 a.m. to get to schools. We really work hard. People might think what we do is easy, but it's not.

Staff members spoke of the difficulties they faced because of their dual role as supervisors and counselors to the Players. Notwithstanding the progress in the Players' lives, one staff member noted:

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> A lot of the Peer Players have problems. They come out of the different high school SPARK programs, and we spend a lot of time counseling them and dealing with a lot of personal problems. We wind up disciplining people a lot. We really don't want to do that, but we are in the middle of this and we need to create a meaningful show.

The director stated:

> If a Peer Player is feeling like their world is falling apart and I am counseling them, then how can I make additional demands on them and ask them as a Director to get up at 6:00 a.m. and travel three hours to put on a show?

Transportation problems were rated as very serious by both Players and staff. One staff member explained:

> Transportation is a horrendous problem. Getting a van for the equipment is difficult and costly. The other piece of the transportation puzzle is getting the Peer Players to the shows when they are often scattered in vastly different locations. This is really difficult.

The Peer Players expressed concerns about traveling to "neighborhoods that sometimes are not so safe." In addition, their 20 hours of work each week do not include travel time--often three to four hours per day--and travel expenses are not reimbursed.

Inadequate space for planning and rehearsing is another major difficulty. One staff member explained:

> The most frustrating thing is getting this whole production together. We need a place with our equipment in it so we can really work out the show. This room is not adequate for rehearsal and all of our other responsibilities.

The musical director reported that he is forced to work in a closet because there is no other space. "The space available

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does not fit ... the equipment, so they work around the furniture the best they can." One player concurred:

> The worst thing about this job is this room, the office space. We rehearse in this room while others are sitting at their desks trying to work. We are performing in the middle of a congested office.

Some restrictions set by the Board of Education also present major difficulties for staff members and Peer Players. One staff member explained:

> The Board makes it difficult with all of its red tape. We need a lot more flexibility, especially in terms of time. It is not a time-clock kind of job like a typical SAPIS position might be. There are ebbs and flows to the workload. When we decide that we are going to do something, then we move with that idea full steam ahead, and do whatever it takes to get it done at that time. The process doesn't conform to the Board's notion of what paid work is. The reports required of us really do not fit the nature of the performing arts.

Another staff member noted:

> We had an amp blow out and it took a month for us to get another one. These are the kinds of things we have to go through--wading through the bureaucracy of the Board of Education. If only we had some sort of slush fund for this work. If we need something replaced for the next show, we need it replaced immediately. If we don't have an amp of the next show, how can we perform? Going through a trail of paperwork, putting in a request and waiting weeks and months, doesn't make sense for this kind of work.

Effectiveness of the program. SPARK Peer Player staff, Peer Players, and school staff recognized the limitations of a performance seen once a year, but felt that the show was nevertheless effective. It "stimulates students' thoughtful discussions, brings up real issues, informs students about the SPARK Program, and adds a more comfortable feeling to the whole [SPARK] program," said one staff member.

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According to a SPARK Peer Player staff member, the fact that this is entertainment is what makes it effective:

> It sets [students] up to get an educational message, but in a fun way; it is entertaining. When the entertainment is good, it engages the kids in the discussion and gets them to divulge and share information; it enables the school-based SPARK counselor to reach kids too.

A principal noted: "The best thing about the Peer Players is that the message is coming from a peer; it's what makes a difference--kids talking to kids." Another principal said:

> It is another avenue for informing the students on substance abuse issues, and the more ways they are hit with this information, the better educated they will be, and the more effective the message will be.

A third principal suggested that it was "the reenactment of real life situations" that made the performance so effective.

One school-based SPARK counselor who observed the performance stated that it covered "age-relevant issues," and another noted that the workshop was the most effective part of the program "because it allows interaction between the students and the Players while they are still in character."

When asked how they measure their own effectiveness, a staff member explained:

> We are effective if the students go to the SPARK counselor after we have performed in their school. You also get a sense of how effective the performance was during the workshop, in terms of whether they ask questions or participate. On an intuitive level, and from experience as a performer, you know when you are a hit or not. You also know it when you are approached after a show, or when the students sing along and respond. We have also gotten thank you letters from schools which we visited. They let us know we are doing the right thing. Even in the schools where the audience is quieter, we have gotten thank you letters.

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> There aren't a lot of quantitative evidence that says that there is a positive effect, but that is not the nature of what we do. This medium and the feelings and transformation that we are trying to create are not quantifiable. It is a non-traditional form of education that makes it hard for us to use traditional means of assessment.

Peer Players had similar ways of assessing effectiveness.

> The program works because we can relate to the audience. Kids can tell if you are fake or not. Afterwards they come to us and tell us that they can relate to the characters we portrayed. Some cry when they talk to us. Many times they don't even know the counselor in their school, so when they come to us, we introduce them to the counselor.

According to another Peer Player: "We know if we hit a nerve; when we spot someone in the audience who we think might need help, we report it to the SPARK counselor." A SPARK counselor added, "The messages they conveyed were loud and clear; the interaction allowed the kids to find out pertinent things about the issues that were presented."

Ways to increase effectiveness. A great deal of pressure is placed on the Players to be professional actors and singers as well as full-time students. For one Player, the stress exacerbated the problems he had been working to overcome:

> There was a period of time when the stress did make me start drinking again. A lot of it has to do with the stress of the job. It takes superhuman effort sometimes to deal with difficulties.

The director of the SPARK Peer Players maintained that not all school-based SPARK counselors are aware of the main purpose of the show: to reach the kids and to identify kids who may need help. A video of the show, she stated, "sent in advance to the schools for review might help spur interest and could be used to

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show t[illegible] we can't get to the school ourselves."

SPEAK Peer Player staff agreed that more work needs to be done t[illegible] coordinate the program with the visited schools, and prepare school staff for follow-up activities, emphasizing that identification of at-risk students can, in fact, be done at the workshop.

School staff suggested that if whole classes were unable to attend, parts of more classes should see the performance. In addition, if given more time for the workshops, the audience could be broken up into smaller groups for fuller discussion.

It would also be helpful for the Players to have greater flexibility in timekeeping, financial compensation for transportation time and cost, increased security, and more counseling if needed.

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SCHOOL STAFF INVOLVEMENT

School staff, and teachers in particular, learn how to identify at-risk students and refer them to available services through formal staff development offered by SAPIS, informal communication with SAPIS, and observation and participation in mandated prevention lessons that SAPIS provide to their classes.

1990-91 Study Findings

The 1990-91 study showed that teachers who had participated in staff development offered by SAPIS rated their communication with SAPIS more positively than nonparticipants. They referred more students to substance abuse prevention services, and more frequently discussed their students' progress with SAPIS, than teachers who had not participated in SAPIS-led staff development. However, the findings also revealed that these percentages were not as high as might be expected, and that even with staff development, some teachers still reported that they neither identified at-risk students nor referred them to SAPIS services.

The nature of staff development at all school levels was found to be extremely varied, however. For example, staff development might consist of a five-minute presentation at a faculty meeting at the beginning of the school year, several presentations during the year to faculty at grade or principals' conferences, or ongoing intensive afterschool workshops offered at the school, another school, or the community school district office. Although workshops offered much more information, their

number of participants was relatively small. Some schools' staff development may actually have consisted only of informal contacts between SAPIS and teachers.

1991-92 Study Findings

For the 1991-92 field study of eight elementary and middle schools, evaluators interviewed district directors, SPARK borough supervisory and administrative staff, SAPIS, and principals. Interviewees described formal staff development as generally inadequate, but informal communication between SAPIS and teachers as very good.

They reported that many teachers learn from the presentations that SAPIS make to their students, and are able to follow up on these lessons with the assistance of materials (e.g., books and videos) that they borrow from SAPIS. However, one SAPIS noted:

> Once [the teachers] take the material into the classroom it's difficult to know how the material is presented; it depends on the teacher's personality and the type of lesson.

Teachers also informally discuss the problems of individual children with SAPIS, and rely on SAPIS for handling substance abuse issues in the classroom. One SAPIS described her work in her school:

> I am always doing consultation. One child came into the classroom with weapons and kicked the door down and the teachers came to me. I went into the classroom and had the children talk about it.

At the high school level, teacher/SPARK counselor communication takes place largely through informal channels rather than at

staff training. However, the informal communication that educates teachers about substance abuse issues does not extend to all teachers or allow sufficient time to go into depth on particular issues.

As in 1990-91, SAPIS reported that many teachers lacked sensitivity to the problems that at-risk children faced. One SAPIS explained:

> [What's important is] being aware of at-risk children and kids stoned on a particular drug or alcohol, knowing how to relate and give support.

Both the 1990-91 and 1991-92 studies found that the lack of teachers' involvement in giving support to at-risk students and referring them to SAPIS' services could be mainly attributed to teachers' beliefs that (1) their training was not sufficient; (2) they do not have adequate time or it is not their role to become involved in prevention; and (3) their students are not at-risk. Other reasons for teachers' low utilization of SAPIS' services include their (1) lack of awareness of SAPIS' role; (2) belief that students should not be taken out of class; and (3) preference for referring students to guidance or other staff.

In the high schools, three out of four principals suggested that it was unrealistic to expect teachers to be well-versed in substance abuse prevention issues. SPARK borough supervisors and director agreed. One quipped, "Teachers call it the 'flavor of the month,' because every month there is some new priority that has to be addressed in the classroom." One SPARK supervisor stated that teachers are fed up with being asked to infuse every

new social issue into their curriculum. A high school SPARK counselor pointed out that some of the teachers have their own problems with substances, such as alcohol and cigarettes, and are resistent to disseminating the prevention message.

Teachers' Feedback on Staff Development

Evaluators provided self-administered questionnaires to teachers in eleven of the field study schools; only 109 were returned by mail.*

Only 24 percent of the respondents (26 teachers) in 1991-92 reported having participated in staff development offered by substance abuse prevention staff, compared with 45 percent in the 1990-91 study. Because the number of respondents who participated in staff development is so small, percentages of responses are omitted in the following discussion.

Teacher respondents indicated that their SAPIS had been helpful in providing guidelines for identifying at-risk students, and/or had offered useful information or insight into particular children in their class.

However, most teachers who reported that they had followed up with SAPIS to discuss particular students or teaching issues

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*Unlike in school year 1990-91, when OREA's field staff distributed questionnaires into teacher mailboxes, in school year 1991-92, school administrators took on this responsibility. In a few schools, principals determined how and to whom the questionnaire would be distributed. Thus, it is not clear how many teachers actually received the questionnaires. In addition, whereas in 1990-91, OREA staff collected the completed questionnaires in the field study schools, in 1991-92, teachers mailed back their questionnaires to OREA. These changes may account for the small number of teacher-returned questionnaires.

noted that this follow-up had been only somewhat satisfactory or not at all satisfactory. Further, about two-thirds of the teachers stated that they had not learned prevention concepts or techniques to use in the classroom. In addition, only about a third had received materials for classroom use (almost all had used or distributed them to their students).

Teacher participants suggested that the program:

- offer more sessions and follow-up sessions;
- give more practical suggestions and more specific information;
- provide greater access to the staff developer after the sessions are completed; and
- use staff development time more efficiently.

Some teachers gave examples of how they used teaching concepts they had learned. One teacher had worked with her children doing role-playing to help them overcome shyness. Another had talked with her pupils about alcoholism, using real-life cases. A third had her pupils discuss people they know personally with drug problems. Finally, one teacher reported having collaborated with her colleagues on prevention issues.

Eighty-three teacher survey respondents had <u>not</u> participated in staff development. About two-thirds of these teachers reported that staff development had not been offered in their district or school. Reasons given by teachers who indicated that staff development <u>had</u> been offered but that they had chosen not to participate included (1) lack of time; (2) inconvenient time; (3) inconvenient location; (4) no need for the credits offered;

and (5) a colleague was going who would share the information. One teacher added that it was too great a time commitment; another indicated that she had heard it was not worth attending. Other teachers' comments included: "I'm not interested in finding out the kinds of substances available," "I don't consider it important enough for me;" and "My job is too stressful to take on anything else--burnout."

Although the number of responses is so small, similar proportions of teachers with and without staff development suggested the same reasons for not addressing substance abuse prevention issues in the classroom:

- lack of time during the day;
- prevention issues are unrelated to curriculum;
- need for training and more practice;
- need for more collegial support; and
- prevention is not their role.

A greater proportion of teachers who had received staff development (31 percent) compared with teachers who had not participated (24 percent) reported that substance abuse prevention issues were unrelated to their teaching matter. In addition, about the same proportions of participating and nonparticipating teachers reported that they had no difficulty with incorporating substance abuse prevention into their curriculum (19 percent and 17 percent, respectively).

The survey's findings, less optimistic than in 1990-91, suggest that the energy spent on staff development is not having

a sufficiently desired effect, and that the problem is not only lack of teacher participation. It appears that directors and staff developers need to pay greater attention to the usefulness of the content of their staff development sessions and to teachers' feedback, as well as continue to find ways to integrate prevention issues into regular curricula.

Directors and other interviewed staff suggested that the level of teacher involvement in substance abuse prevention could be improved by providing incentives for teachers to include substance abuse prevention in their already crowded curriculum. Specific suggestions included (1) paid (per session) training; (2) mandated hours of substance abuse prevention training; and (3) the inclusion of substance abuse prevention as a graded curriculum area.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

While parents' involvement in their children's development is essential for their success, parents of at-risk youth, who may themselves face serious problems (including substance abuse), may especially need opportunities to discuss problems, ask questions, establish supportive networks with other parents, and find out about needed resources such as referrals to helping agencies.

Substance abuse prevention and intervention programs have made efforts to engage the parents of at-risk children in a variety of supportive and educational activities. The most common of these are parent workshops, offered in 73 percent of all New York City public schools, according to the 1990-91 Citywide survey.

The number of workshops and participants vary widely among schools, but citywide survey responses indicated that the topics discussed in parent workshops usually include (1) substance abuse prevention services in local schools and districts; (2) the signs and symptoms of substance abuse; and (3) communication skills. About one-fifth of New York City public schools (19 percent) offer parent leadership training. Once trained as parent leaders, these parents can themselves become workshop leaders, group facilitators, outreach workers, and resources for referrals (Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Programs in New York City Public Schools: The Citywide Survey, OREA, 1992).

Despite efforts to involve parents in their children's education, interviewed directors, SAPIS, SPARK staff, and principals agreed that parent involvement is generally low, and particularly low for the parents of at-risk children. Contributing to this, directors noted, is the low self-esteem and lack of stable housing and employment of such parents. Yet they reported a low level of parent involvement in more economically advantaged communities as well, partly based on parents' denial of substance abuse as a problem in these communities. Generally, the most involved parents were reported to be those functioning at a higher level, while those who themselves most need services are least involved in their children's schooling.

Strategies Used in the Elementary Grades

The key to good parent involvement, according to some interviewees, is good, open communication between parents and

schools. Creative strategies to increase parent involvement that have been reported as helpful include the creation of a telephone network system with recorded messages. If a child tells a parent that he/she does not have homework, the parent can call a number, and using a code for that child's particular school and teacher, reach a recording that spells out exactly what homework has been assigned that night and what is happening during that week.

Recognizing that information and notices sent home through students sometimes did not reach their parents, another school wrote for a grant to create a newsletter that would keep parents up-to-date with what was happening at school. In another district, a grant funding a "drug-free team" enabled five schools to offer workshops and organize committees to address parents' needs. The major needs of parents were family counseling, support groups, summer programs, and day programs.

A district in the 1990-91 study made intensive efforts to telephone parents who were thought to be possibly neglectful of or abusive to their children. By using the personal telephone call to invite them to a workshop series, asking them to make a commitment to attend the entire series, and making reminder calls the day before each workshop session, district substance abuse prevention staff were able to increase parent involvement.

Parent Involvement in the Upper Grades

Most of the interviewed middle and high school staff noted that parents in the older grades play a much more limited role in

their children's schooling than parents of elementary school children. Yet, a middle school principal reported an occurrence which highlighted the need for parents of older children to be part of the school community: a parent of a seventh grader had become angry when the principal took away her daughter's knife in school, because the parent had given the child the knife for protection.

An example of how parents can be an enormous support was described by a high school principal. Two students who had fought were defended by their parents, and intervention by their teacher, guidance counselor, and the principal had failed to resolve their conflict. But when two other students' parents were asked to intervene, the two angry families were able to resolve it.

However, high school staff argued that in many cases, involvement by parents of at-risk students who are receiving intervention services is not necessarily a positive strategy. Many of these parents are the source of their children's problem, and their communication with the SPARK counselor brings into question the confidentiality of the student's discussions with the counselor.

A strength of intervention programs, as seen by high school staff, is the opportunity for students to work out some of their problems within the context of a peer-oriented program. The SPARK director explained:

> There's not always a need for parent involvement. Parents can muddy the waters. In situations where

> families won't cooperate, the best we can hope for is for kids to learn to cope until they're able to take care of themselves. Parent involvement depends on the nature of the issue. . . . Parents are exhausted; it's dangerous to come out to workshops at night. However, it's necessary to involve them in cases of suicidal, homicidal, and drug-abusing students.

While the overall goal of parent involvement is not contested, the amount of time and resources spent on outreach to parents must be weighed against the advantages of their involvement for their children's benefit. One high school borough supervisor noted, "It is difficult, and with the urban and single parent family model, it may not even be advisable."

Another borough supervisor suggested that it may not be worthwhile to spend a large amount of resources on parent involvement efforts at the high school level. He explained that SPARK counselor's efforts to work with their students' family members tend to be ineffective, either because many families soon stop coming to meet with them, or because if families continue, the SPARK counselors become overburdened.

Ways to Increase Effectiveness

Enabling parents to participate in their child's education has been a difficulty for all schools. Although the barriers of scheduling, child care, intimidation, and fear of crime are important, one principal maintains that parents will come to "programs that they feel are important to them and that help them recognize their importance in the school."

High school SPARK staff reported that parents had in fact expressed the need for teachers and counselors to be more

accessible, friendly, open, and accepting; to improve their approach toward poor and less educated parents; and to increase the availability of family counseling in order to help bring parents into the school.

Other suggestions for bringing parents into the school included (1) offering increased outreach to ESL and bilingual parents; (2) offering an orientation program; (3) inviting parents to attend school and take classes with their children; (4) offering crafts workshops, support groups, and health workshops; and (5) establishing a community project for parents, students, and staff. Outreach efforts should include using letters, follow-up telephone calls, and PTA announcements, and directly talking with walk-in parents.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Substance abuse prevention and intervention programs in New York City public schools are impressive for their impact on students with a wide range of problems, including substance abuse, low self-esteem, school failure, truancy, criminal behavior, family problems, teen pregnancy, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Given the difficulties of providing services with serious time constraints, lack of private space, and, at times, little support from school staff, Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) at all school levels have shown that their trustworthy, caring, supportive, and consistent presence has made a difference in the lives of many students at risk of abusing drugs and alcohol.

INTERVENTION SERVICES

Because directors and borough supervisors interviewed in 1990-91 defined intervention services as the core of their programs, OREA's 1991-92 study paid special attention to the 891 survey responses of students who were receiving intervention counseling services. These responses overwhelmingly suggest that consistent support from professional staff is vital for these young people. Many students indicated that participation in intervention counseling had made a positive difference in their lives. For some, counseling had helped them conquer suicidal wishes.

Many students believed that they had improved in their school performance since they had begun receiving counseling

services. They were able to deal with authority in more appropriate ways, stop cutting class, and improve their grades. They changed their behavior to stop using drugs, stop stealing and fighting, and stop abusing their girlfriends. Many could understand their family better, and could believe that there was hope and respect for people like themselves.

Eleventh and twelfth grade students in this study tended to assess their progress in more positive terms than students in the other grades. This finding may be attributed to these students' greater maturity, longer time in intervention services, and apparent commitment to remaining in school (and therefore likelihood of being encouraged by counseling).

This study's student respondents, taken as a whole, viewed their progress in school performance, self-esteem, and learning life skills more positively when they participated in more weeks of counseling services--notably, when they were in counseling for about one full school year. This finding is not surprising, given the intensity of many students' problems and suggests that short-term interventions are not likely to produce desired results in many cases. Rather, more ongoing counseling services characterized by trusting relationships and consistent support may be required to help many students overcome serious behavioral and emotional problems, stay in school, and learn to lead constructive lives.

However, a subgroup of students who received many weeks of counseling services appeared particularly hard to reach. Despite

receiving up to a school year of counseling services, they gave low self-reports of their progress. These students need to be better understood in order to formulate more successful approaches to working with them.

Study findings suggest that intervention services are effective in alleviating the problems that many students face every day, since they enable regular contacts between trained counselors and youngsters. Since schools are settings that are well suited for organizing counseling groups for students, expansion and further development of school-based professional counseling services should be considered.

A follow-up student survey, in school year 1992-93, along with a study of these students' other school outcomes, such as promotion and graduation, will yield a more complete view of the role of intervention counseling in changing the lives of at-risk students over a longer period.

PEER PROGRAMS

A field study conducted as part of the research in school year 1991-92 revealed that peer programs are effective prevention strategies, but also that the support of the district superintendent, school staff, and parents, as well as trained peer leadership staff with specialized knowledge and skills, are needed for effective programs.

This study's focus on the SPARK Peer Players found that this program component's impact is felt much beyond the hours spent in the high schools they visit. After the program, students have

been reported to contact the SPARK Program, get referrals, informally continue discussing the issues raised in the performance and workshop, and remember the songs performed by the Peer Players.

However, the difficulties that SPARK Peer Players face in implementing their program need to be addressed. These include lack of reimbursement for Peer Player's transportation time and expense, lack of space, dealing with inflexible bureaucratic regulations, and lack of coordination with the high schools for preparation and follow-up after the performance/workshop program.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The study also highlighted some of the difficulties in disseminating substance abuse prevention messages to teachers--a prerequisite for staff support of school-based prevention efforts. Some substance abuse prevention staff reported that support from school personnel and parents is inadequate, and that their programs have been adversely affected as a result. SAPIS reported that they had neither the sufficient time nor the participation of a sufficient number of teachers to make the desired impact. However, many teacher participants also reported that they have not used what they learned in their formal training sessions.

On the other hand, the most useful interactions between SAPIS and teachers take place at the informal level, and in some schools, SAPIS reported having good communication with a large part of the teaching staff. Furthermore, some teachers, at least

in the lower grades, are able to learn about substance abuse prevention and identify at-risk students by participating in the prevention lessons offered by SAPIS to their classes. These opportunities for communication are, far more limited in larger middle and high schools. In addition, administrative support for staff involvement in prevention is weaker in the high schools. For teachers to become more fully informed about and supportive of th program, substance abuse prevention needs to be a required part of their preparation or in-service training.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The study uncovered problems in involving parents in substance abuse prevention. Although some districts and schools have used creative strategies to improve their communication with parents, these efforts have not been widely successful, since many parents of children at risk for substance abuse are drug abusers themselves, while others face an array of problems that interfere with their ability to become involved in school or district-based activities aimed to enhance their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the use of SPARK counselors' time to involve parents may not, in some cases, even be a beneficial strategy, particularly in the case of high school students.

However, staff at all school levels still believe that parental involvement can improve with greater respect for parents who are economically disadvantaged and less educated than school staff, increased availability of family counseling, invitations to participate in classes with their children, and greater outreach to bilingual parents, including ESL classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this study emerged directly from the study respondents. These are listed so that central office administrators, district directors, and high school administrators and borough supervisors can consider them.

- Expand and strengthen intervention counseling as a long-term service by making greater efforts to increase school administration's and staff's support of SAPIS' efforts. In addition, increase the availability of family counseling services to offer an important source of support for many needy families. Continually upgrade SAPIS' counseling skills.

- Explore additional and/or alternative ways of helping those students who gave low assessments of their progress even after many weeks of counseling services. These students are hardest to reach, and efforts need to be made to find appropriate new approaches.

- Give middle school students particular attention, since they demonstrate more negative behavior than students at other levels, and are potential early school drop-outs.

- Make greater efforts to communicate to school staff the results of effective peer programs to enlist their support for and understanding of the role of peer programs.

- Offer a more thorough orientation on the purposes and activities of the SPARK Peer Players to high school SPARK staff in order to enlist their participation and post-program follow-up, including seeking out the students who identified themselves as in need of services during workshops.

- Require teachers to participate in a training or in-service substance abuse prevention course, as well as take a more active role during substance abuse prevention lessons offered by SAPIS, in order to increase their knowledge and awareness of the issues.

- Increase efforts to bring parents into the school by focusing on the activities that most interest the parents themselves. To counter the feelings of alienation felt by some parents, as well as children, pleasurable activities that draw them together could be planned, such as trips or cultural events. School staff's attention to the manner in which they relate to parents, and outreach efforts to non-English speaking parents, should also be carefully considered.

This study continues to be part of a larger commitment to clarify the roles and contributions of substance abuse prevention efforts for New York City school children.